

# *NATO in Afghanistan: from now to Chicago*

## *Summary of U.S. Policy*

*February 17, 2012*

- The United States, together with our allies and partners, has made important progress toward our core goal in Afghanistan and Pakistan: defeating al Qaeda and denying it a safe-haven. We have also worked to break the Taliban's momentum and built the capacity of Afghanistan's government and security forces.
- At the NATO Summit in Lisbon in 2010, the United States, our allies and partners, and Afghanistan agreed to support an Afghan-led transition process. We agreed that the transition would begin in 2011, and lead to the Afghan Government having full responsibility for security across the country by the end of 2014. As an Alliance we are fully committed to that Lisbon framework, and we are committed to executing it together: "in together, out together."
- Transition is already underway, and nearly 50 percent of the Afghan population is living in areas transitioning to Afghan lead. In the context of this transition, President Obama announced the initial drawdown of American troops, as 10,000 U.S. troops left Afghanistan by the end of 2011, and 23,000 more will exit by the end of this summer.
- By the end of 2014, the transition to Afghan lead will be complete, with the Afghan National Security Forces fully responsible for security throughout Afghanistan.
- As transition progresses, the role of our forces will evolve from their lead combat role to a support, advise and assist role as Afghan forces move into the lead. During this entire transition process until the end of 2014, our forces and all of ISAF will continue to be fully combat ready and will conduct combat operations as required.
- When President Obama announced that we would host the NATO Summit this May, he said that at the Summit leaders would define the next phase of transition. In the lead up to May, we are consulting and coordinating with our ISAF and Afghan partners about how a shift in mission can occur most effectively in the Lisbon framework. Ultimately, final decisions on transition will be made by President Obama and his fellow leaders in Chicago.
- As a part of our transition discussions in Chicago, leaders will also discuss how we can support sustainable and sufficient Afghan National Security Forces for Afghanistan's future, and how we can further strengthen the NATO-Afghanistan Strategic Partnership, which will endure beyond 2014.
- Chicago will therefore be a critical milestone in our effort in Afghanistan, as leaders come together to determine the next phase of transition, and the future of our support for Afghanistan and its security forces.

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### **Q: What does transition mean for U.S. troop numbers?**

*\*\*Note: On June 22, President Obama said: "After this initial reduction, our troops will continue coming home at a steady pace as Afghan security forces move into the lead. Our mission will*

*change from combat to support. By 2014, this process of transition will be complete, and the Afghan people will be responsible for their own security.”*

- In June, President Obama announced the initial drawdown of American troops, as 10,000 U.S. troops left Afghanistan by the end of 2011, and 23,000 more will exit by the end of this summer.
- President Obama also said in June that after our initial drawdown is complete in the summer of 2012, U.S. troops will continue coming home at a steady pace and our mission will shift from combat to support as the Afghans take the lead. That is still the case.
- The President will make decisions on the size and shape of our presence after summer 2012 at the appropriate time, based on our interests and in consultation with our Afghan and NATO partners.

**Q: Are you considering an acceleration of the transition timetable, to be completed in 2013?**

- Our goal all along has been to help the ANSF take the lead for security. That could include a shift in our mission before 2014, though we will have to continue consultations with our allies and Afghan partners about the best way forward.
- During the entire transition process until the end of 2014, even as Afghan forces move more and more into the lead, our forces and all of ISAF will continue to be fully combat ready and will conduct combat operations as required.
- We’re confident that we can achieve our core goal of defeating al Qaeda and denying it a safe haven, while supporting the Afghan Government and building the capacity of its Security Forces.

**Q: What role will the U.S. play after 2014?**

- The United States will remain committed to denying al Qaeda a safe-haven from which it can threaten the United States. We are also building a long-term partnership with Afghanistan.
- In that context, President Obama has been clear that our relationship with Afghanistan will extend beyond 2014. As the President and President Karzai agreed in May 2010, we will have a strategic partnership between our nations that provides a long-term framework for our bilateral cooperation in the areas of security, economic and social development, and institution building.
- We are continuing to work with the Afghan Government to negotiate the text of a Strategic Partnership document and hope that it can be concluded in the near future.
- More specifically on U.S. forces, the President will make decisions on the size and shape of our presence after summer 2012 at the appropriate time, based on our interests and in consultation with our Afghan and NATO partners.
- We have been clear that any post-2014 presence by the U.S. would be at the invitation of the Afghan government and aimed at ensuring that we are able to target terrorists and support a sovereign Afghan government so that our enemies can’t outlast us. We have also been very clear that we do not seek permanent bases in Afghanistan or a military presence that would be a threat to Afghanistan’s neighbors.